

Marion Johnson
National Archives and Records Service
Washington, D.C. 20408

July 17, 1975

Dear Mr Johnson

Although we spoke over the telephone during my two-day visit to the Archives last weekend we did not meet. I count it my loss. Next time I must repair the omission. For now please accept my grateful thanks for your courtesy and helpfulness. And will you be so kind as to let Mr Lindt know my appreciation extends to him equally, as it does to all the workers with whom I came in contact who were unfailingly and cheerfully helpful. I am encouraged, therefore, to ask for your assistance in clarifying a number of points which occurred to me in the course of examining the material which you arranged for me to study and on which I took notes.

In a letter to me, dated March 25, 1975, Ms Jane Smith, Director Civil Archives Division, listed the dates of ten transcripts of Warren Commission executive sessions, wholly or partly available for research, and the dates of three withheld from research. The first date in Ms Smith's listing is December 5, 1963, the last September 18, 1964. Last week end I found an agenda for each of only four sessions: January 21, 27, February 24, April 16, 1964; and am at a loss to understand why the Commission's procedure did not include adoption of an agenda at each session.

While it is possible the agenda of a particular session was not completed and was carried over to a following session or sessions without formal motion or notice, it seems odd formal procedure would have been followed in a few instances and disregarded in most. And it is, obviously, not an explanation for the absence of an agenda for the first session in Ms Smith's listing, if it was the first executive session held by the Commission. The qualification derives from information communicated in a letter from Mr Mark Eckhoff, Acting Director, Civil Archives Division, dated June 6, 1975, in which he wrote, "We do not know the total number of executive sessions of the Commission." It may be a close study of the transcripts will yield clues to the solution of this puzzle. Or, perhaps your command of the great volume of material on the Commission enables you to identify documents or data to explain this oddment.

Another problem relates to the agenda dated April 16, 1964. That date does not appear in Ms Smith's listing. What does it mean? Was an executive session scheduled for April 16, 1964? Was it canceled? Was it held? If the latter, where is the transcript? Can you help resolve this problem?

Answers to these questions may be somewhere in the Commission's files, for on January 13, 1964 General Counsel Lee Rankin sent a five-page "Memorandum To The Staff," on page two of which he noted, "4. Files and Mail Room. The files maintained by the Commission are under the supervision of Miss Farrar. It is planned, of course, that these files will include all the raw materials and product of the Commission's work, arranged in a way both convenient for our purposes and for the subsequent use of the materials by historians. Miss Farrar is currently in the process of setting up a subject index of our work

Do the Archives have that subject index?

Another matter in which Ms Farrar's files, or other material in the Archives, may be of assistance involves "the minutes of the autopsy" of President Kennedy which, Counsel Rankin informed the Commission during its executive session of January 21, 1964, "...we asked for ..." (page 35 of the transcript; page 134 of Sighttext edition of a number of transcripts). The transcript records Mr Rankin's statement as a response to Commissioner McCloy's inquiry about "the raw material of the autopsy;" and makes clear Mr Rankin's intention to use "the minutes of the autopsy" in evaluating "the raw material of the autopsy." In view of the continuing controversy over the autopsy, it seems to be important to complete this record, if possible, by locating the original or a copy of Mr Rankin's request, or determining it was made verbally in person or by telephone on a particular date; identifying the addressee or addressees; examining the reply he received or establishing that he received none; and discovering what, in consequence, he reported or failed to report to the Commission. Any light shed on this problem should be most gratefully acknowledged by all who seek truth.

In the invaluable Inventory of the Records of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, compiled by you to the eternal benefit of researchers, under "Miscellaneous Records ... 52. Related Materials Received From The Secret Service," I noted "(1)...(a) Certificate of Death filed in Texas;" and in a folder marked "Copies of documents received from the Secret Service by the National Archives, RG No. 272 Stack Area 6W.3 Row 14 Compartment 23 Shelf 7 I came across a Xeroxed copy of the death certificate made out by Dr Kemp Clark in Parkland Hospital in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Cause of death is given as "... (a) Gunshot of ..." I could not make out the third word. The otherwise helpful attendant in Research Room 204 did not have a magnifying glass. I thought the word might be "brain" or "brains." Can you advise me?

"(2)" under "52. Related Material" reads: "The original and six pink copies of Certificate of Death (NAVMED N), consisting of the ribbon copy, five carbon copies, and a pencil draft of the Navy Certificate of Death, all on the pink 'NAVMED N' form." Folder "Copies of documents" contains a copy of this "navy" death certificate which was made out by Presidential physician, Dr George G Burkley, RADM, and signed by him on November 23, 1963 at the White House. Do the Archives have anything which can explain why two death certificates were issued on two successive days by two different doctors in two different cities for the same person? It is a puzzlement as the king sings in Anna and the King of Siam. I have asked various individuals for their ideas on the subject but have encountered only evasion or flat refusal to discuss the subject. Which leaves me wondering why neither certificate was included in the Commission's Report or supplemental volumes of exhibits. / a problem

"52. Related Materials" also included "(c) receipt from the Federal Bureau of Investigation for a missile recovered during the examination of the body." And in the folder, "Copies of documents," the two-page "Memorandum of Transfer" of autopsy materials to the Archives on April 26, 1965 lists "Item 9...Thermofax reproduction of memo from Francis X. O'Neill, Jr...and James W. Sibert...to Capt. J.H. Stover, Commanding Officer, U.S.N. Medical School, regarding receipt of missile, dated 11-22-63." The same folder contains a

copy of the receipt hand signed by FBI agents O'Neill and Sibert on November 22, 1963, addressed to Captain Stever and reading, "We hereby acknowledge receipt of a missile removed by Commander James J. Humes, MC, USN, on this date."

Are there other documents, other data in the Archives on this most important point? It has been my understanding no bullet, projectile, or missile was found in President Kennedy by Commander Humes and the other two autopsy surgeons who worked with him. The X-rays taken during the autopsy, I believe, showed none. A report by Messrs. O'Neill and Sibert, according to what I have read in the evergrowing voluminous literature on the assassination of President Kennedy, was dated November 26, 1963 and noted: "Inasmuch as no complete bullet of any size could be located in the brain area and likewise no bullet could be located in the back or any other area of the body as determined by total X-rays and inspection revealing there was no point of exit, the individuals performing the autopsy were at a loss to explain why they could find no bullets."

The source I read stated this report had not been published but was included in Commission Document No. 7, but I do not find it among the numerous listings of the contents of GD No. 7 in Appendix III, on pages 40-43, of your Inventory, probably because Appendix III is a "List Of Numbered Commission Documents And Parts Of These Documents Published In Commission Volumes XXII-XXVI Of The Hearings Of The Commission;" and the Sibert-O'Neill report of November 26, 1963, if that is the correct date, was not included in the Warren Report nor in the supplemental volumes of exhibits. Am I correct?

Please let me know if the Archives have any material which can explicate these seemingly contradictory Sibert-O'Neill documents. If their report of November 26, 1963 is available I should like to obtain a copy, as I would of the four-volume FBI Summary Report of December 9, 1963 and the one-volume FBI Supplemental Report of January 13, 1964, if they are not too expensive.

One reason for my visit to the Archives was to see again the Zapruder film which I had seen before, with your assistance, on September 2, 1965. I had in mind to check the notes I made ten years ago and to correct any falsification of memory a decade and polemics may have wrought; also to verify or disprove what a number of individuals have professed to see in the film and slides. I believe that the reproduction, if that is the correct word, of the Archives' copy of the original 8 mm. film in 16 mm. because of the deterioration of the 8 mm. copy and the need to preserve it; and its projection at the rate of 24 frames per second, defeated my purposes.

If it is permissible and agreeable to you I should like to see the film and frames again, this time in the company of an expert in film and film making, fields in which I know nothing. If this can be done will you let me know whether we should bring equipment with which to project the film at slower speeds and possibly to make blowups.

I fear I am putting you to a great deal of trouble. The way of the archivist, like that of the truth seeker, is hard. But the cause is worthy, I trust you will agree. I will counsel myself to be patient until I hear from you.

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Appreciatively,